

UKRAINIAN EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC EYES



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What is the view of Ukrainian citizens on present-day domestic education? How do they assess changes that are taking place in this sphere? What do they think of a present-day Ukrainian teacher?

In order to determine the attitude of the population to problems of Ukrainian education, the Sociological Service of Razumkov Centre conducted a sociological survey on April 18-24, 2002, in which 2,000 respondents aged 18 and above were polled¹.

How will today's "secondary" problem turn out tomorrow?

Now, when the Ukrainian state is at a difficult stage of socio-economic transformation, society is living through period that is not so good. Economic issues are becoming a primary concern for the average person. Thus, the greatest problem, which was indicated as the most important by 73% of the adult population, is a low level of wages and pensions². The problem of unemployment (42.8%) is ranked second, and a growth in the rate of crime (40.3%) — third. Against this background, citizens do not take problems of a humanitarian nature seriously. On a list of 33 problems, the family's inability to provide a child with a specialised or higher education is ranked 15th (15.3%), whilst the family's inability to provide a child with a quality secondary education — 21st (10.3%).

It is understood, that for a majority of citizens who live on the brink of poverty, educational problems are forced into background. At the same time, people's mentality has certain inertia: we used to think that providing children with education was not a problem, as this was taken care of by the state.

Problems faced by education now will acutely be felt by society only in some time, so at present they are not of immediate importance for the average Ukrainian. However, it is necessary to think about them today because tomorrow it will be too late. The current problems of education provide the basis, which in the future will give rise to most burning problems — crime, poverty, immorality, etc.

The level and accessibility of education

One can start with the fact that those polled do not have a high opinion about the level of education in Ukraine — they assess it somewhat below "average" (Table "Assessment of the education level provided by Ukraine's present-day educational system"). In so doing, the level of vocational education is assessed as the lowest — only 6.8% of the polled consider it to be "high". The overwhelming majority of citizens (45.4%) assess this level as "average" and 28.9% — think it is "low". The situation with the level of secondary education is no better — in 82.2% of responses it does not achieve an above "average" grade.

Meanwhile, according to the data gathered by this survey, the majority of the population (54.8%) is convinced that quality secondary education is accessible to all citizens of Ukraine. 41.5% of the polled do not share this view. Nearly a mirror reflection of proportion is observed in the assessment of accessibility of quality secondary vocational education: 40.7% of respondents believe that it is accessible to all citizens of Ukraine, while 50.6% — do not agree with this opinion.

**Assessment of the education level provided
by Ukraine's present-day educational system,
% of the polled**

	High	Average	Low	Hard to say
Secondary	7.5	51.5	30.7	10.3
Vocational	6.8	45.4	28.9	18.9
Higher	18.1	42.3	19.2	20.4

¹ Hereinafter are the results of this survey unless specified otherwise.

² The sociological survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between November 25 and December 5, 2001. 2,000 respondents aged 18 and above were polled in all Ukraine's regions.

A most positive assessment is given by citizens to the level of higher education in Ukraine — the number of those who consider it to be “high” (18.1%) and “low” (19.2%) are approximately equal. 42.3% of the polled are convinced that the level of higher education in Ukraine is “average”. At the same time, the respondents assessed the accessibility of quality higher education to all citizens of Ukraine somewhat lower. As little as every ninth respondent (10.9%) thinks that such education is accessible, while 82.5% of the polled hold the opposite opinion. It may be though that the quality of this education is higher exactly because it envisages selection and is less accessible.

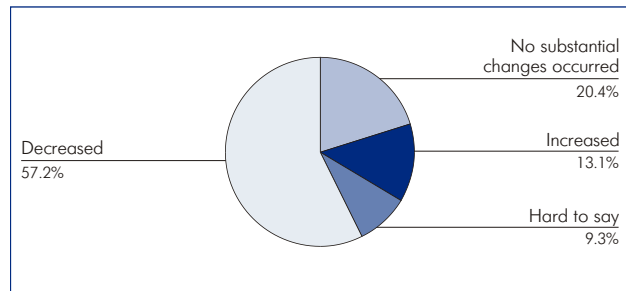
Certain explanation of such a perception by citizens of accessibility to higher education can be obtained by comparing various assessments of the general education level provided by domestic schools. It was assessed on a 5-point scale by an all-Ukrainian survey of respondents who have children or grandchildren of school age, by school graduates³, secondary school teachers⁴ and lecturers of pedagogical universities⁵. It needs to be noted that the assessment of parents and teachers practically coincided: parents assessed the general education level to be equal to 3.75 points and teachers — to 3.71. This may show, in particular, the adequacy of assessment by teachers of their activity. Schoolchildren assessed their knowledge considerably higher: the average assessment was 4.01. However, lecturers of higher educational establishments have a stricter approach to evaluating university entrants' knowledge. They assess the general level of their knowledge to be equal to 3.54 on average. Moreover, asked about the continuity of education, 41.5% of higher educational establishment lecturers said that the knowledge received in school was insufficient for studying in higher educational establishments (only 13.8% of secondary school teachers gave such an answer). Less than a quarter of the university lecturers polled (23.2%) believe that school knowledge is sufficient for studying in a higher educational establishment (among the teachers polled — 31.2%). Such a difference in approaches to the assessment of the level of knowledge of those graduating from school undoubtedly influences the accessibility to higher education.

Thus, citizens of Ukraine tend to acknowledge the lowering of the education level in the country. This is true in respect of both the general education level of the population and the efficiency of the educational system at large. According to the view of an absolute majority of the citizens polled (57.2%) this level has decreased. Every fifth individual (20.4%) have noticed no substantial changes, and only 13.1% of the polled are convinced that this level has increased (Diagram “Assessment of changes in the general educational level of the population over the years of independence”).

Changes in the educational system: negative rather than positive

Conclusions drawn by the citizens regarding changes in Ukraine's educational system in the years of independence are disappointing. More than a half of the polled (54.7%) are convinced that over this period the

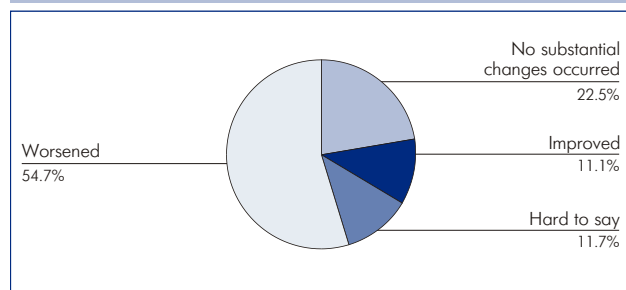
Assessment of changes in the general education level of the population over the years of independence, % of the polled



educational system has worsened and only every ninth individual polled (11.1%) — that it improved. 22.5% of respondents think that the situation remains unchanged (Diagram “Assessment of changes in the educational system over the years of independence”).

Of course, one can recall numerous problems and difficulties that are behind such assessments. But it is worthwhile to note that, for instance, in Latvia, which started off from the same Soviet position, the situation differs radically from that in Ukraine. Thus, according to the results of a sociological survey conducted by the SSKD Agency, more than a half of Latvia's citizens (53.1%) think that, in comparison with Soviet times, the quality of education in Latvia has improved, and 33.1% — that it has worsened⁶. No doubt, Latvia has outstripped Ukraine in many other indicators as well, but is it an excuse? It rather shows the incapacity of Ukraine's system of management in different spheres including education.

Assessment of changes in the educational system over the years of independence, % of the polled



The fact that the bodies of state administration should, in people's view, be responsible for the state of affairs in Ukraine's education is evident from the answers to the question of who has the greatest influence on state decisions in the sphere of education (Diagram “Assessment of the level of influence on state decisions in the sphere of education” on p.44). The Ministry of Education and Science, according to the opinion of the polled, has the greatest influence (62.4%), followed by the Cabinet of Ministers (35.4%), the President (29.9%), and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (27.4%). Coming next on this list, and trailing by a big margin, is the educational

³ The sociological survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between April 22 and May 8, 2002. 1,200 pupils of the ninth and the eleventh classes were polled in all Ukraine's regions.

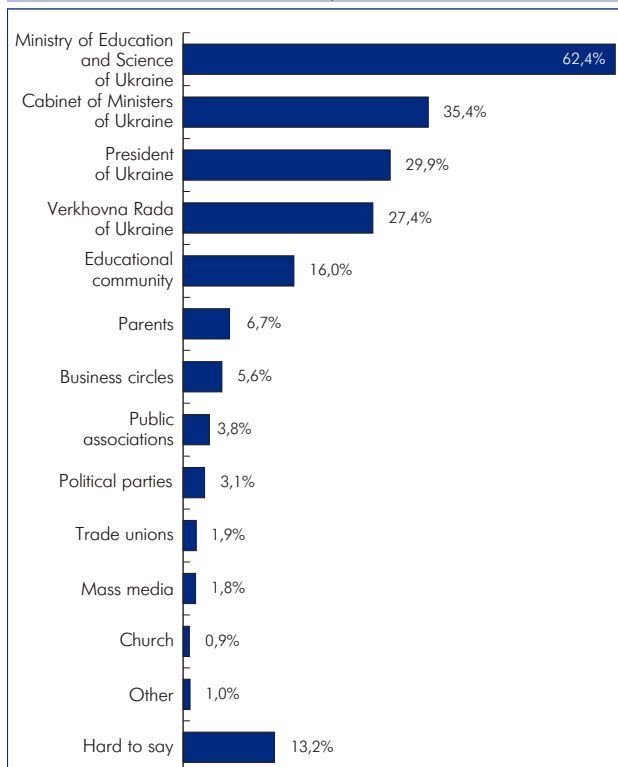
⁴ The sociological survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between April 22 and May 8, 2002. 300 secondary school teachers were polled in all Ukraine's regions.

⁵ The sociological survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between April 22 and May 8, 2002. 300 lecturers of pedagogical universities were polled in all Ukraine's regions.

⁶ LETA of August 31, 2001; <http://www.leta2000.com>.

community (16%), whereas parents (6.7%), business circles (5.6%), public associations (3.8%), political parties (3.1%), trade unions (1.9%), mass media (1.8%), and the Church (0.9%) have little or no influence on state decisions, in the view of the polled. Ukraine's citizens are not being original in their opinion. For instance, according to the assessment of a U.S. citizens public opinion poll by the Gallup Organisation⁷, the greatest impact on the decision-making process that concerns public schools is made by the bodies of the state administration: 49% of the polled believe that this process is greatly influenced by the Federal Government, 43% — by the State Government, while the influence of the rest of institutions, including the students and teachers proper, is considerably lower — such is the view of 7% to 29% of the polled.

**Assessment of the level of influence
on state decisions in the sphere of education,
% of the polled**



* Respondents were offered to give three answers

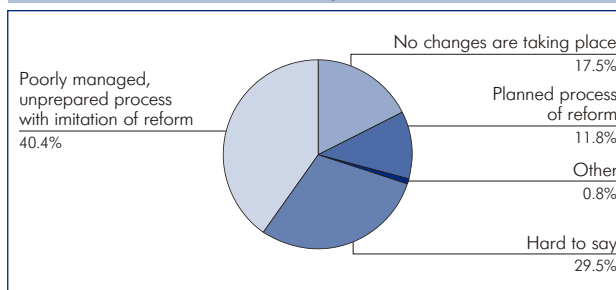
Ukraine's citizens consider the activity of the bodies of state administration in the sphere of education to be ineffective. The biggest share of respondents (40.4%) view reform of Ukraine's educational system as a poorly managed, unprepared process with imitation of reform (Diagram "Assessment of progress in reforming the educational system"). Only 11.8% of the polled consider that it is a planned process, which is even less than the number of those who are convinced that no changes are taking place at all (17.5%).

It is regrettable that the most noticeable actions of the state in the sphere of education have thus far been limited to the introduction into secondary education of a 12-year education format and a 12-point scale of knowledge assessment, which are viewed negatively by

⁷ Public Perspective, September/October 2001, p.23.

⁸ The sociological survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between July 28 and August 10, 2000. 2,012 citizens aged 18 and above were polled in all Ukraine's regions.

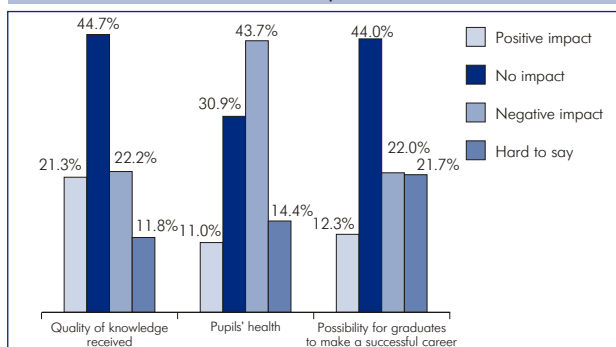
**Assessment of progress in reforming the educational system,
% of the polled**



most of respondents. This is understandable: first, because the former 5-point scale has been recognised by Ukrainian society at all levels — by both the government and the public — since it was used by several generations throughout decades; secondly, for an average Ukrainian it is hard to comprehend how a knowledge assessment scale can possibly improve the quality of knowledge.

Earlier, in carrying out an all-Ukrainian survey⁸, Razumkov Centre Sociological Service asked citizens to assess a possible impact on schoolchildren of extending the period of study in secondary school. The responses received were rather sceptical (Table "Assessment of a possible impact of education period extension"). Having generalised the respondents' answers, one can predict that the extension of the study period will not produce any appreciable impact on the quality of knowledge

**Assessment of a possible impact of education period extension,
% of the polled**



received (21.3% of the polled think that the impact will be positive, 22.2% — that it will be negative, 44.7% — are convinced that the extension of the study period will not influence the quality of knowledge); somewhat negative impact can be expected regarding a possibility for school graduates to have a successful career (44% — believe there will be no impact, 22% — expect a negative impact, 12.3% — a positive one); a more negative influence is that this move will be at the cost on pupils' health (43.7% — anticipate a negative impact, 30.9% — no impact, 11% — positive impact).

**How much of paid education
does Ukraine need?**

Perhaps, someone thinks that the extensive introduction of a system of paid education and private educational establishments is a universal remedy against all evils. In the view of the polled, the level of instruction in private schools is higher than in public ones. Assessing

the level of general education on a 5-point scale, almost three-quarters of parents (72.7%) whose children study in private schools gave an excellent grade; 18.2% — graded it “4”, 9.1% — put “3”; no respondent gave it a grade of “1” or “2”. Parents whose children study in public schools gave the following grades: “1” — 1.2%, “2” — 2.2%, “3” — 33.9%, “4” — 46.0%, “5” — 16.7%.

One need not overestimate the effect of such a comparison, however, since children of the absolute majority of respondents (97.4% of those polled who have children or grandchildren of school age) study in public schools. As little as 1.4% of citizens, who had children of school age, answered that their children studied in private schools, and 0.5% of those polled said that their children studied in both public and private schools (such respondents had more than one child). At that, citizens who have children or grandchildren of preschool age are not very eager to send their children to private schools — over three quarters of the polled (76.6%) plan to send a child to public school, 15.4% — have not yet decided. The main reason for not wanting to send a child to a private school is inability to pay tuition (50.9% of respondents who have children or grandchildren of preschool age and plan to send them to a public school). Nearly a quarter of this group (24.1%) is convinced that a public school can provide no worse education than a private one.

Thus, private schools are not a sufficient condition of solving the problems of secondary education. Furthermore, citizens are not optimistic about the idea of introducing a system of education that must be paid for. Almost three quarters of the population (74.5%) have a negative attitude to the introduction of paid education, only 15.1% — have a positive one.

Teacher's authority: yesterday... today... tomorrow

It may prove to be expedient to pay attention, at the government level, to another problem and channel our (taxpayers') resources to its solution. We are talking about support to teachers. Survey results show that parents do not want their children to become a teacher even at a private school, which gives evidence that teachers are in a fairly hard situation in Ukraine. Only 17.3% of the polled said that they would like their children to become a teacher of public school, 22.1% — of private one. On the other hand, respectively 67.4% and 60.7% of the polled would not like such a fate to befall their children.

There is a marked difference from the above figures in the attitude to a child's becoming a lecturer of a higher educational establishment. One third of respondents (33%) would like their child to lecture in a private higher educational establishment; nearly a half of those polled (48.2%) would not like this. For a state higher educational establishment, these indicators are somewhat worse: 31.8% — would like to see their children lecturing in such an institution and 50.6% — would not.

After such an exposition, a rather moderate assessment by children and their parents of the authority of a present-day teacher should not come as a surprise (Table “Assessment of the authority level of a present-day teacher”). Only one in ten pupils (9.4%) thinks that

teachers enjoy “high” authority with children. Almost half of the children polled (47.0%) consider this level to be “average” and more than a third (35.7%) are convinced that it is “low”. Regarding the level of authority of a present-day teacher among parents, the answers of those polled were distributed in the following manner: “high” — 12.3%, “average” — 50.3%, “low” — 28.4%.

But there is no point in casting stones at teachers for their low level of authority. The data of another survey conducted by Razumkov Centre⁹ show that teachers are not at fault in this situation. Thus, according to the results of this survey, teachers enjoy the highest level of popular confidence among representatives of the eighteen professions offered to the polled. 43.7% of those polled say that

**Assessment of the authority level of a present-day teacher,
% of the polled**

	High	Average	Low	Hard to say
Among children	9.4	47.0	35.7	7.9
Among parents	12.3	50.3	28.4	9.0

they completely trust teachers, while 45.3% — that they rather trust than not. For comparison: construction workers were ranked second, with 32.9% of the polled completely trusting them, and 48% — rather trusting than not. Coming last on this list are politicians, who are completely trusted by only 1.8% of citizens (which is less than the number of those trusting prostitutes — 3.2%), and rather trusted than not — by 20.1%.

The fact that the low level of teachers' authority is to a great degree caused by their social status rather than by their professional level and moral qualities is reflected in the attitude of citizens to the ways of correcting the situation (Diagram “What actions can raise the prestige of the teacher's profession?” on p.46). 87.4% of respondents think that the prestige of the teacher's profession will rise together with the increase of the teacher's wages. Noticeably, the increase in the quality of pedagogical education as a way of increasing prestige of the teacher's profession was mentioned by 33.5% of the polled or 2.5 times less (Diagram “Assessment of the level of budget expenditure on education” on p.46).

At the same time, citizens consider the present level of budget expenditure on education to be clearly insufficient: 44% of those polled assess this level as “low”, and 40.8% — “very low”. Only 4.8% of those polled think it is “sufficient”, and 1.6% — “very high”.

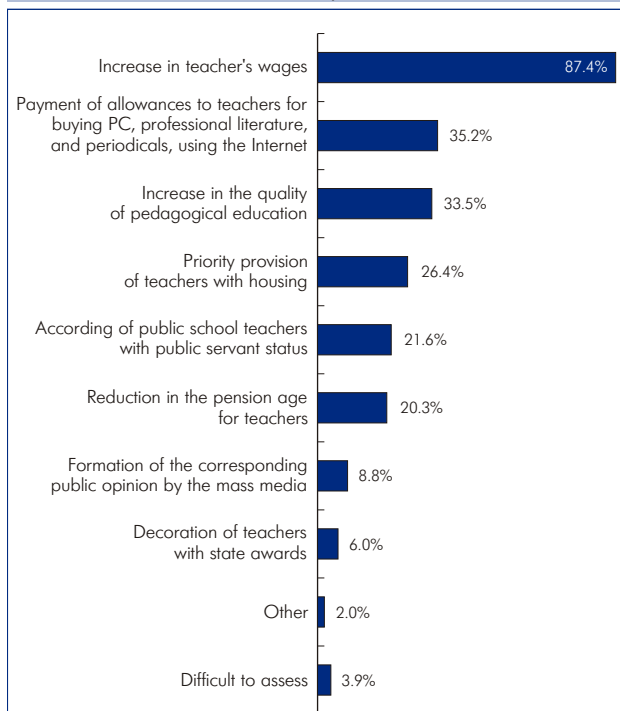
Strictly speaking, teacher's wages pose a problem not only in Ukraine. According to the opinion of the U.S. citizens polled by the Gallup Organisation¹⁰, improvement in education provided by public schools can best be achieved by raising teacher's wages — 52% of respondents consider the influence of this factor to be substantial. However, it is dangerous to compare wages of Ukrainian and American teachers because this may cause serious psychological blow to domestic educators.

If no actions are taken to improve the conditions of teachers, society may sustain considerable losses. Thus, citizens of Ukraine regard pedagogical education as not

⁹ The sociological survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service on February 19-27, 2002. 2,033 respondents aged 18 and above were polled in all Ukraine's regions.

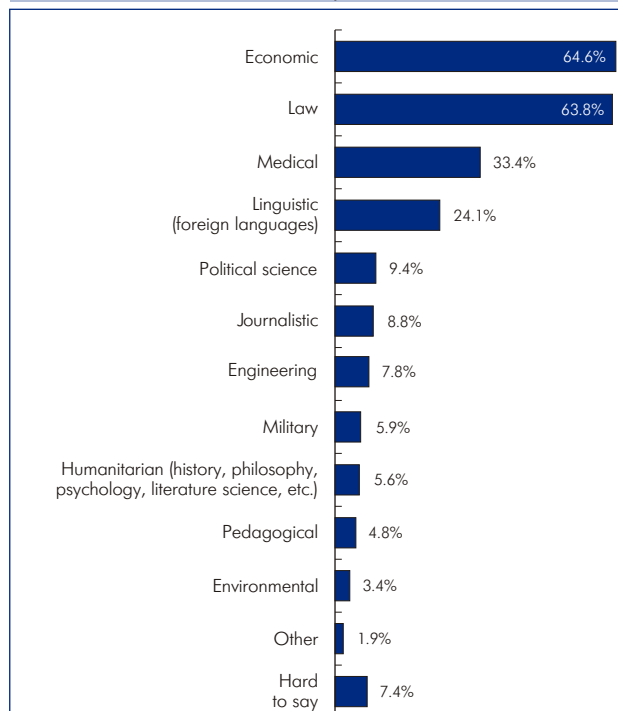
¹⁰ *Public Perspective*, September/October 2001, p.20

**What actions can raise
the prestige of the teacher's profession?**
% of the polled



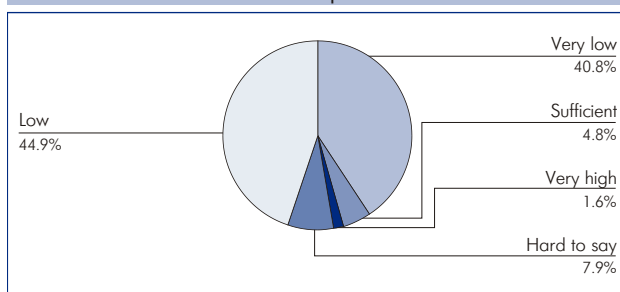
* Respondents were offered to give three answers

**What kind of education is most promising
on the labour market today?**
% of the polled



* Respondents were offered to give three answers

**Assessment of the level
of budget expenditure on education,**
% of the polled



very promising on the labour market. The respondents believe that the most promising on the labour market are economic (64.6%) and law (63.8%) professions (Diagram "What kind of education is most promising on the labour market today?"). About a half of those polled see some promise for medical (33.4%) and linguistic (24.1%) education. The attitude of respondents to other professions is even more sceptical: only 9.4% of the polled are convinced of the promise of a political

science education, 8.8% — of a journalistic education, 7.8% — of an engineering education. Still less promise citizens see in a military (5.9%) and humanitarian (5.6%) education. Significantly, the least popular from among the proposed professions were pedagogical (4.8%) and environmental (3.4%) education.

Nearly a third of the students of pedagogical universities¹¹ are not going to work as teachers after graduation: 26% — say that this is highly unlikely, and 5.5% — that they will definitely not work as teachers. At that, every fifth student (19.5%) has not yet decided on this issue. Only 4.5% of students explained their choice of pedagogical education by expectations that the profession of teacher would provide for them financially. Hence, there remains less than a third of the student community (30.5%) who believe that they have a vocation to be a teacher. But even those who follow their vocation need to eat. And the impoverished teacher is a bad example for pupils who are Ukraine's future. Therefore, by supporting teachers, the state not only would foster the improvement of the educational system but would also make very promising investments that are expected to benefit the entire society in the future. ■

¹¹ The sociological survey was conducted by Razumkov Centre Sociological Service between April 22 and May 8, 2002. 1,200 first-year students and graduates of pedagogical universities were polled in all Ukraine's regions.